

CAVALCADE OF COUNTIES:

RURAL DESTINY

**Warren County Had the Makings of Another Paterson
but its Rich Natural Resources Were Never Exploited**

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

IT REQUIRES some tall stretching of the imagination to visualize great industries spread all along the Delaware River from Phillipsburg to Belvidere, yet it might have been. In fact, viewed solely from the standpoint of the natural power of the streams pounding out of the Warren County hills to the Delaware River, it should have been.

Tick off the names of those streams—the Paulins Kill, the Pequest, the Pohatcong, the Musconetcong—whose waters have for countless centuries cascaded into the Delaware River. The mighty Delaware itself wore the tremendous gap through Kittatinny Mountain and at Foul Rift, the Delaware drops 16 feet in less than a quarter mile. That power, in the hands of an Alexander Hamilton, would have meant another Paterson, at least, on the banks of the Delaware.

But it wasn't to be. Clouded land titles held the county back in the early 19th Century, when great industrial expansion began everywhere. No Hamilton came forward. Destiny meant Warren County to be essentially rural; circumstances made destiny prevail.

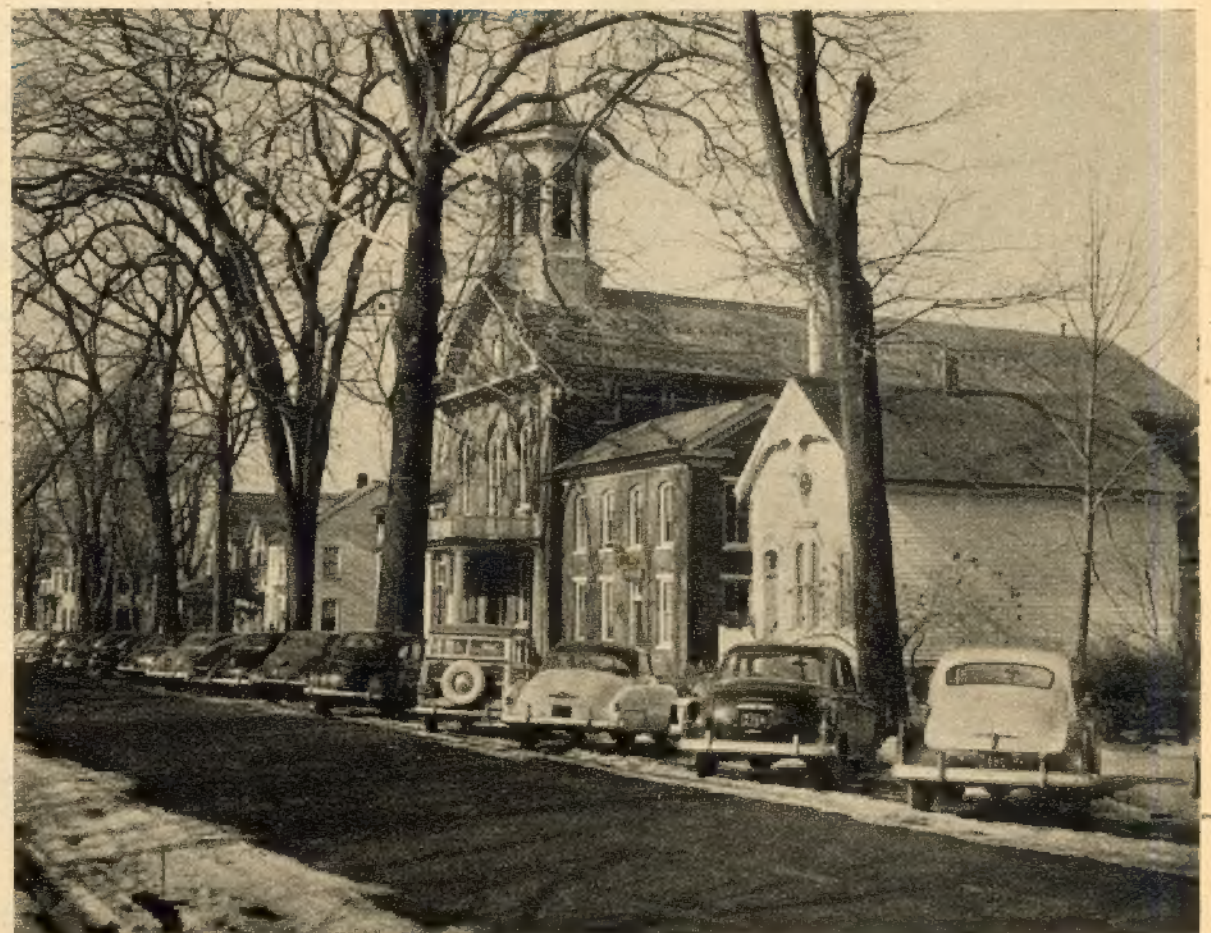
It wasn't that Warren got off to a slow start, either, because in the 1650s Dutchmen from Esopus (Kingston, N. Y.) started to pick copper out of the Kittatinny Mountain, near the Delaware Water Gap. They built the Old Mine Road and laboriously hauled the copper northward to the Hudson, when with only moderate effort they might have floated it down the Delaware on rafts.

Of course Philadelphia didn't even exist in 1657, when copper began heading for Esopus, and when the English took over all of New Jersey in 1664 the Dutch just stopped digging copper and settled down to farming. Nevertheless the Dutch didn't exhibit even mild curiosity in the Delaware River or where it ran; for 75 years their attention focused up the Old Mine road to Esopus.

WILLIAM PENN saw the power possibilities at Foul Rift, but he never developed the 5,000-acre tract he bought at the Rift in 1716. Ten years later, settlement of the county began in earnest, when George Green and John Axford came overland from Long Island. Tradition says they climbed a tree, and from their vantage point agreed that Green should settle at the pond which is now Mountain Lake and Axford should settle at what is now Oxford.

Others followed—Abram Van Campen bought 1,666 acres on the mountain above Delaware Water Gap in 1732, Lodewick Titman bought land near the Gap in 1737, Harmon Shipman settled on Scott's Mountain in 1740, settlers built a log church at Mansfield (now Washington) in 1741, and that same year Aaron Depui established his famous store in John Axford's town.

Such colonization merely set the scene for the arrival of Jonathan Robeson in 1742 to build an iron furnace at Oxford. Robeson shipped his first ore on March 9, 1743, hauling it overland to a wharf just below Foul



Warren's steepled Court House in Belvidere is over a century old.

Staff photos by Porter.

Rift and floating it in boats downstream to Philadelphia. Oxford immediately became important; people from 30 miles around shopped at Aaron Depui's store. Robeson's iron works required great manpower to turn out two to three tons of ore a day—men to dig the iron, men to cut the timber needed to make charcoal, men to feed 400 bushels of charcoal into the furnace for every ton of iron produced.

CONTROL of the booming iron enterprise slipped from Robeson's hands in 1754, when Dr. William Shippen and his brother Joseph acquired full control. The Shippens built an elaborate stone house in 1754 and Oxford became a social center, where wealthy Philadelphians frequented gay parties and exciting fox hunts—with "Gentleman Joe" Shippen ever in the fore.

Other small settlements emerged, such as Greenwich-on-the-Delaware, which Robert Patterson established in 1750 where the Pequest River met

the Delaware. Helm's Mills had enough settlers in 1760 to make it worthwhile for Judge Samuel Hackett to call them together for a barrel of good spirits at the local tavern. As they imbibed, Judge Hackett suggested that Hackett's Town might be a better name than Helm's Mills—and the barrel-emptiers agreed.

Early farmers found so much difficulty tilling the rugged mountain slopes that severe food shortages occurred between 1753 and 1763, but Moravians from Bethlehem, Pa., saw the potential of the land and bought 1,000 acres in 1768. They built enduring stone buildings, including an indestructible mill, and as they built for the ages, they called their village Hope.

POSSIBLY the first man to visualize the tremendous industrial potential of the Pequest River was Major Robert Hoops, who bought Patterson's holdings in 1769 and immediately used the Pequest to turn mill wheels.

This is the last of a series of articles dealing with New Jersey's 21 counties, which were published in alphabetical order on successive Sundays. The first of two articles in summation will follow with next week's "The Genius of New Jersey."



Main streets in Blairstown (left) and Washington. Former originally was known as Gravel Hill and later was once nation's organ-making capital.



In hilly Phillipsburg, the stairway at left connects a section of South Main street, pictured above, with Bullman street. Photograph of 1920 (below), shows Phillipsburg and neighboring Pennsylvania town of Easton (left) at confluence of Lehigh and Delaware Rivers.



Hoops officially called the settlement Mercer, but as early as 1777 he referred to it in letters as "Belvidere."

Hoops sent grain down the Delaware to Philadelphia in Durham boats, flat-bottomed craft which went down stream readily enough but had to be laboriously poled upstream. He built a slaughterhouse just in time to be of tremendous service to General Washington's army during the bitter Winter months in Morristown. At times every available wagon for miles around was requisitioned to carry Belvidere grain and meat to Morristown.

Oxford iron also helped the Continental cause greatly, although historians disagree on whether the Shippens favored the Crown or the Cause. At any rate, they left Philadelphia during the British occupation in 1777 and lived at Oxford. Dr. Shippen's niece, Peggy Shippen, met and married Benedict Arnold in Philadelphia — and may well have influenced Arnold's later treasonable actions.

MANY Tories fled from other parts of the state to the Montana region of Scott's Mountain, but to its patriotic credit the county contributed Brigadier-General William Maxwell of Greenwich, commander of all New Jersey regular troops for most of the

war. It also contributed Mrs. Margaret Vliet Warne, of what is now Broadway. Peggy (as the countryside knew her) took over when doctors went off to service. She traveled on horseback with her nostrums packed in saddlebags and continued her duties as an obstetrician and midwife well into the 19th Century.

Robert Hoops found his fortune gone in the post-war depression and left Belvidere in the 1790s to found the town of Olean, N. Y., but before he departed, Hoops sold a large tract south of the Pequest to the celebrated Robert Morris. Morris gave the tract to his son-in-law and daughter Charles and Mary Croxall, in a peculiarly-worded deed whose provisions held up the development of Belvidere for nearly 30 years (and perhaps forever). It took an Act of the Legislature to set aside the deed in 1818.

At the same time the Penn family helped in land manipulations deliberately designed to stop development in Phillipsburg so that the newly-founded town of Easton might grow. Settled in about 1735, Phillipsburg grew slowly, but by 1790 it was at least bigger than Easton—until the Penns stepped in. Land values declined and

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Ruins of blast furnace, one of the earliest in Jersey, at Oxford.

WARREN COUNTY



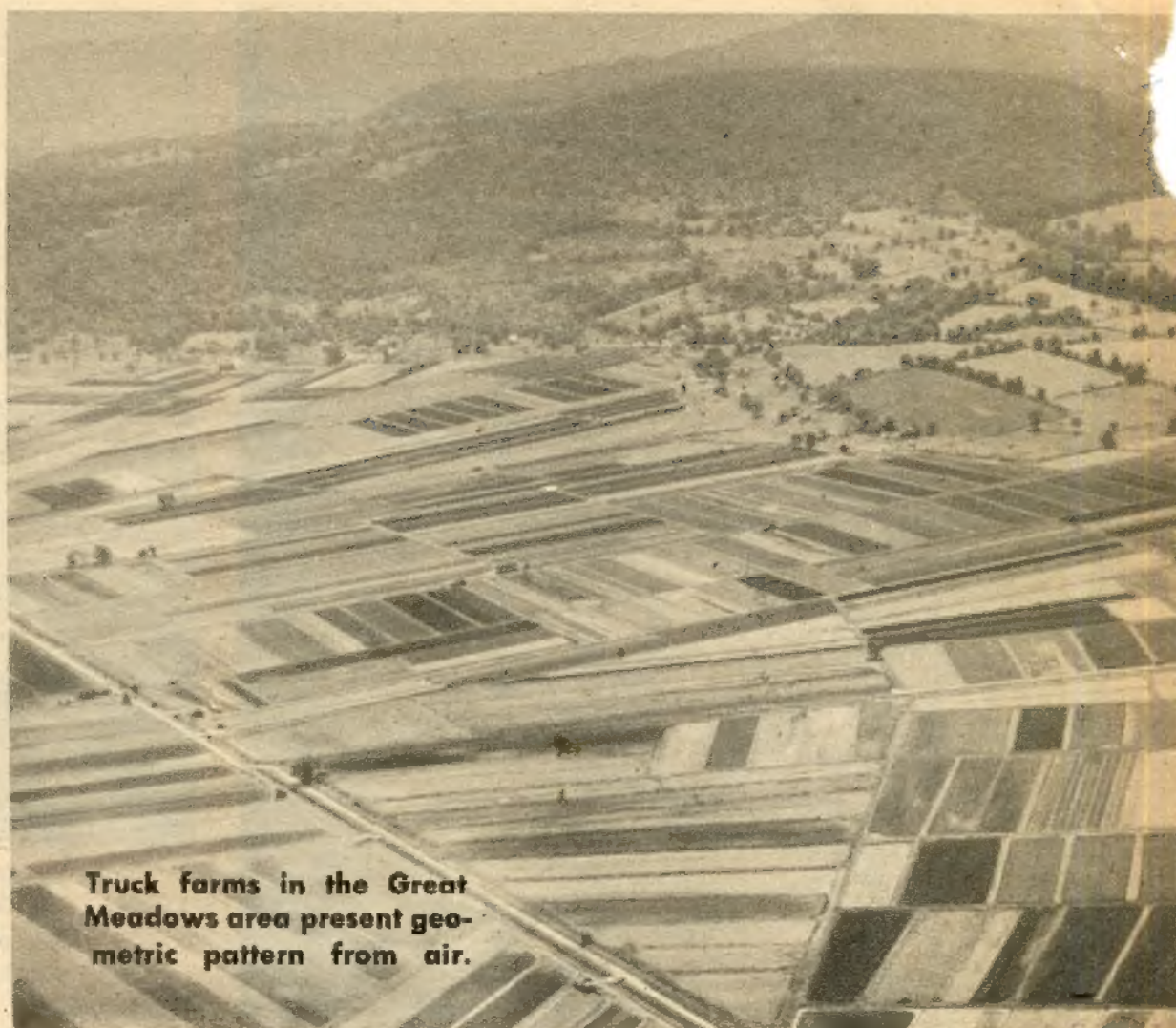
SCENIC WEALTH: Delaware Water Gap in upper Warren County . . .



. . . the covered bridge at Columbia, last such Delaware River span . . .



. . . and waterfall near center of town on Pequest River in Belvidere.



Truck farms in the Great Meadows area present geometric pattern from air.

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Jacob Reese and Philip Seager bought the 92-acre town of Phillipsburg in 1793 for \$530.

SO LITTLE regarded was Phillipsburg that the charter for the Morris Turnpike in 1806 called for the pike to be built from Morristown to a point "opposite Easton." Actually, the principal reason for the pike seemed to be the mineral springs atop Schooley's Mountain, where the wealthy gathered to relieve their aches and pains. Wagons and carriages rolled right through Phillipsburg and over the covered wooden bridge to Easton. That bridge, incidentally, lasted for 90 years after it was built in 1805 from the proceeds of a lottery.

The early years of the 19th Century brought varying fortunes. First, the old Oxford Furnace closed down in 1809 after timber supplies gave out. However, down the valley, Colonel William McCullough built the brick Washington House in Mansfield in 1811 and as the village prospered it took the name Washington, after the tavern. John Rutherford's great estate spread out near Allamuchy, where Rutherford had come in 1778.

So prosperous had the area become, in fact, that residents pushed for freedom from Sussex County, to which they had been tied since that county's establishment in 1753. Finally, on November 20, 1824, the Legislature created a new county and named it for General Joseph Warren, Revolutionary War hero who fell at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

AMONG Warren's 18,000 residents at the time were many men and women of note, but none loomed larger than Miss Catharine Leach, born in 1816 in Greenwich. Her mother died a few days after Catharine's birth and her father raised the baby "mit der spoon"—and did such a remarkable job that Miss Catharine grew up to weigh 764 pounds, with

a waistline of nine feet, six inches. She married William Schooley of Greenwich and moved to Ohio, then later toured the country as possibly the fattest woman in all history.

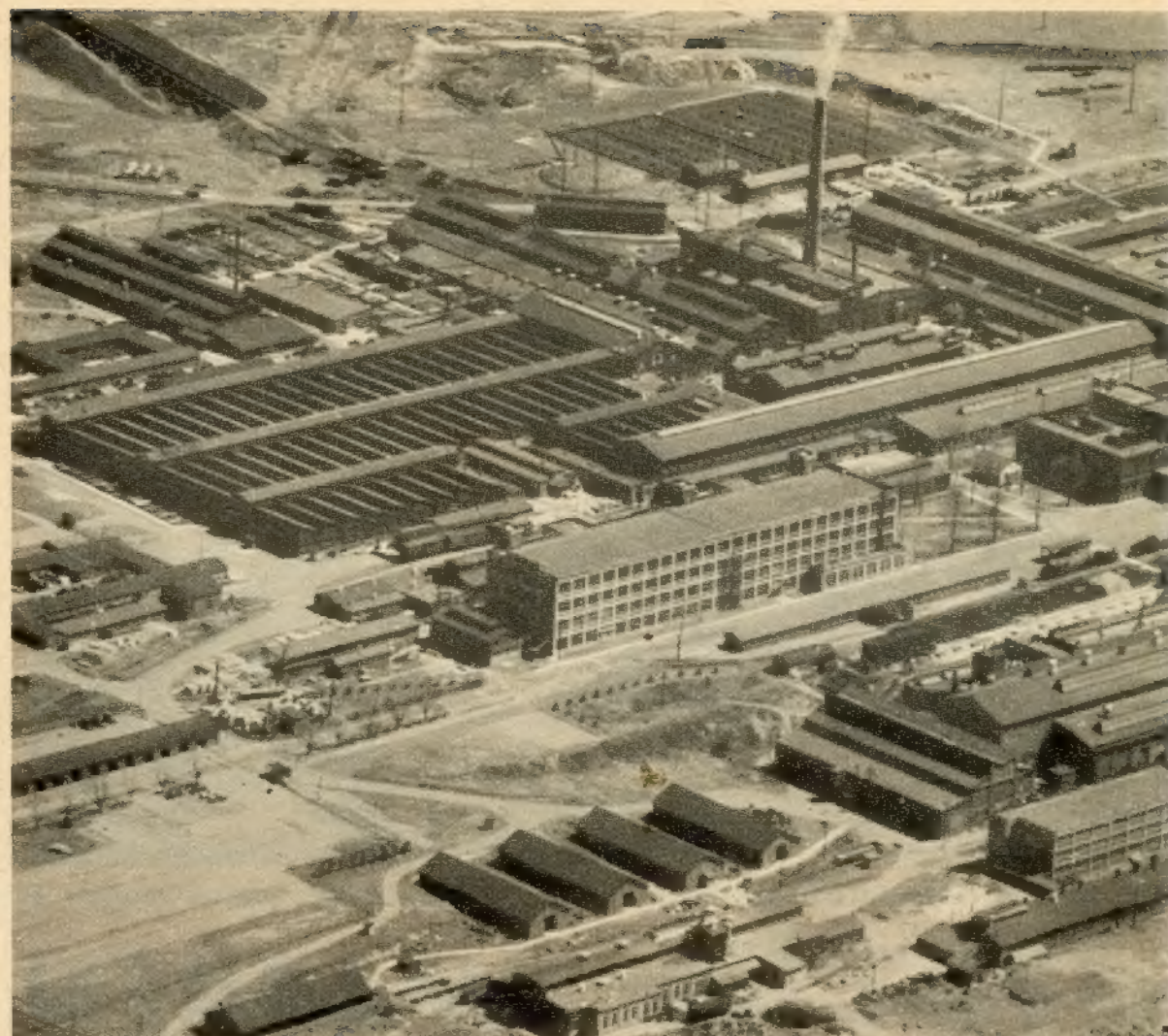
Belvidere sprouted after county fathers chose it as the county seat, in a decision reinforced by the gift of \$1,000 and a plot of ground by Garret D. Wall. Wall also gave land for the county park, provided that it be "always kept as a public square." Land values jumped in 1826, with one corner lot bringing the "extravagant" price of \$3,600.

No such good times pervaded Phillipsburg, even after the Morris Canal stretched across the state to Newark in 1832 with Phillipsburg as the western port. Scarcely a new house went up in the village, and industrial activity continued to center in Oxford, where William Henry rekindled the old furnace in 1831.

Henry decided to try the new hot blast process originated in England in 1828, and in 1834 at Oxford he used the hot blast for the first time in America. Henry refined the English blast so much that he raised temperatures to 500 degrees (compared with a maximum of 220 degrees in England). His blast revolutionized the iron industry everywhere; output shot up 40 per cent, costs dropped 40 per cent.

George W. and Seldon T. Scranton bought the Oxford property in 1839, then a few years later joined William Henry in founding Scranton, Pa., in the mountains of Pennsylvania. Nevertheless Oxford bloomed as an iron center and in the 1850s made great numbers of railroad car wheels.

THOSE railroad car wheels symbolized a new day for all Warren County, first because of the vigor it brought Phillipsburg and secondly because of John I. Blair. Phillipsburg in 1848 had only 47 dwellings, but by 1852 had attracted J. R. Templin's small iron



and brass foundry and furnaces of the Trenton Iron Co.

Then, in 1852, the Jersey Central Railroad rolled into Phillipsburg and within three years the Belvidere-Delaware and the Lehigh Valley railroads had entered town, making Phillipsburg the railroad gateway to the West (further augmented in 1865 when the Morris & Essex Railroad finally fought its way through to Phillipsburg).

John I. Blair spanned almost the entire 19th Century in Warren County, having been born at Foul Rift in 1802 and dying in Blairstown in 1899. In between, he became a highly successful merchant at Gravel Hill (which changed its name to Blairstown in 1839) founded Blair Academy in 1848, became a railroad builder and financier throughout the United States and amassed a fortune of \$70,000,000. Despite his tremendous successes, he kept his home in Blairstown for almost 80 years and kept ever alive his warm affection for the mountain slopes of Warren.

Although the railroads thrived and helped Warren County to grow, the rivermen kept alive their hopes. Flat-bottomed Durham boats disappeared soon after the Morris Canal started, but the inception of steamboating stirred men along the Delaware. One noble effort ended tragically on March 6, 1860, in the attempt to run the steamer "Alfred Thomas" from Easton to Belvidere. Just as the ship slipped out into the river from Easton on her maiden trip she suddenly blew up, killing 12 persons, including two of the owners. That ended steamboating north of Phillipsburg.

LOCAL tragedy faded into the greater tragedy of Civil War, and a Warren County man, Benjamin Lundy, can be looked upon as the man who first systematically fanned the flames of discord over slavery. Lundy, born and raised in Quaker Settlement near Allamuchy, probably never saw a

slave until he left his father's Warren farm in 1808 at the age of 19 to visit Wheeling, West Va.

There he witnessed the brutal herding of bewildered Negroes into so-called "stock yards." His revulsion led to the founding of the American Abolition Society. Horace Greeley later called Benjamin Lundy "the first man to devote his life to the slaves" and it was Lundy who converted William Lloyd Garrison to the cause of abolitionism. As a Quaker, Lundy abhorred war, but his pen and his never-ceasing lectures did much to speed the open break.

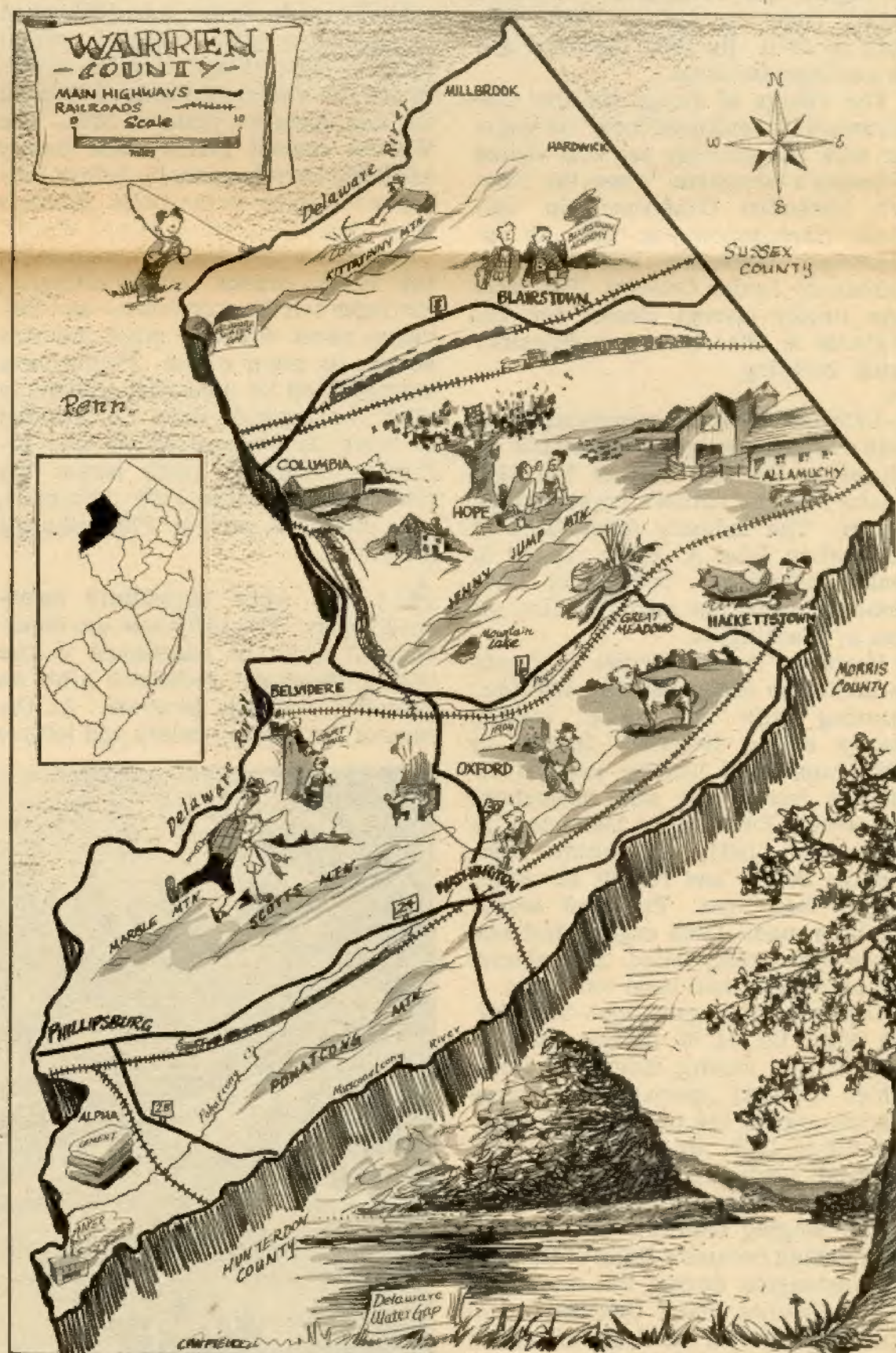
Fittingly enough, then, Warren County supplied the nation's first volunteers after President Lincoln called for men on April 15, 1861, three days after Southern guns pounded Fort Sumter. Captain Edward Campbell of Belvidere rallied seven officers and 50 men about him and marched them off to Trenton on April 18, much to the astonishment of unprepared authorities. New Jersey, credited with supplying the first volunteer troops, earned that distinction because of Belvidere.

INDUSTRY moved ahead in Warren County after the war, particularly in Phillipsburg. Warren Foundry, established in 1856, grew rapidly. The Andover Iron Co. succeeded the Trenton Iron Co. and built two additional furnaces in 1868. Stove works, a boiler works, a rolling mill and a sheet iron company followed by the 1870s. Phillipsburg toiled and expanded.

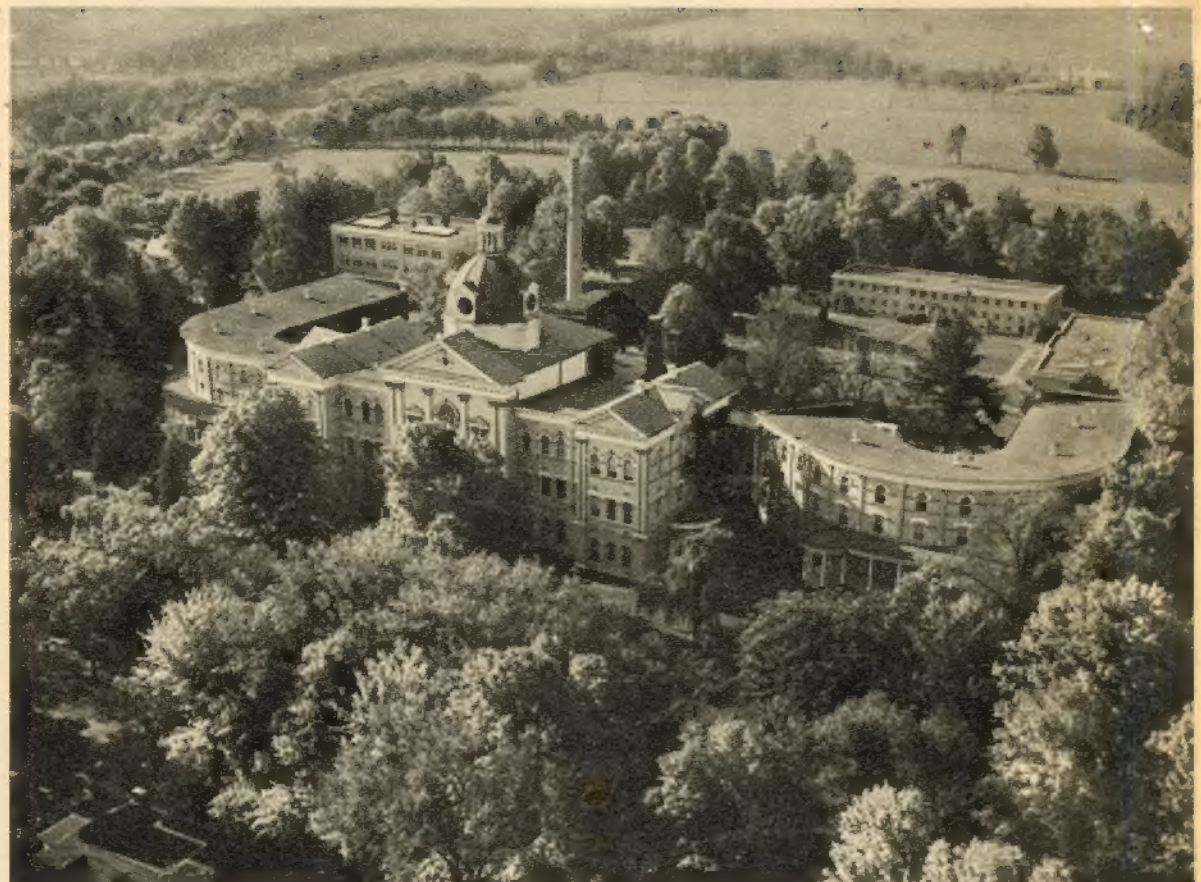
Oxford continued to be as big an iron story as ever, particularly after the Oxford Iron Co. took over in 1863 and built a new furnace, with a capacity of 12,000 tons per year. A new nail factory making 240,000 kegs of nails a year, a foundry, and a rolling mill kept men busy digging iron ore from the Oxford Hills.

John Riegel started an extensive
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Ingersoll-Rand's Phillipsburg plant, the county's largest industry.



County map of Warren, named for hero in the battle of Bunker Hill.



Blair Academy (left), founded in 1848, at Blairstown, and an airview of the campus of Centenary Junior College, girls' school in Hackettstown.

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paper mill along the Musconetcong River in 1862, and Hackettstown found prosperity in the manufacture of wagons and carriages, an industry dating from the factory Jacob Day built in 1815. By 1880 the town had 10 carriage factories.

The village of Judge Hackett also advanced its "cultured look" (so popular with the carriage set who visited Schooley's Mountain) when the Newark Methodist Conference in 1867 chose Hackettstown as the site for Centenary Collegiate Institute (now Centenary Junior College). The Institute finally started classes for 183 students in 1874 in a new five-story brick building.

CCULTURE also had something to do with the prominence Washington attained in the last half of the 19th Century as the nation's organ-making center. The industry dated back to 1850 when John A. Smith started to make melodians. Ten years later Robert Hornbacker made the first organ in Washington.

However, it took Daniel F. Beatty to make the organ industry big-time. Starting with one dollar capital, Beatty had a five-story factory in 1880 capable of turning out 500 organs a month, for sale throughout the world. Fire leveled his factory in September, 1881, but within eight months Beatty had rebuilt his plant, bigger than ever. The first month his men made 1,003 organs, but two years later Beatty failed. His rebuilding apparently had been too costly.

Others made organs, too—Star Parlor Organ Co., H. W. Allegar and Cornish & Co., among others. Cornish, which at first specialized in large church organs, led the town in organ-making in 1900. By World War I the demand declined, possibly because Thomas A. Edison's phonograph made parlor singing old-fashioned, and organ-making became a thing of the past in Washington during the war when the companies found themselves unable to collect on hundreds of organs placed in Europe on credit.

If Edison had anything to do with

WARREN COUNTY

the lessened demand for organs, he partially made up for it in 1899 when he opened a huge Portland cement plant at New Village, close to Alpha, where the Vulcanite Portland Cement Co. had opened a plant in 1894. The Warren cement plants made nearly 4,000,000 barrels annually before they began to decline in the 1920s. Edison's plant closed just before World War II.

Oxford's iron industry collapsed in the 1920s, organs left Washington, carriages left Hackettstown—and Belvidere never attracted much industry despite its water power. Phillipsburg strengthened its industrial leadership after the Ingersoll-Rand Co. decided to move its compressed air and hydraulic machinery plant across the river from Easton in 1904. Silk mills, too, played a part in Phillipsburg's growth.

ALL this while agriculture developed slowly. The 1870s saw the thousands of acres of mucklands in the "Great Meadows" reclaimed after an extended drainage program. At the turn of the century celery and lettuce

growers began to utilize the rich black earth in earnest. Cattlemen began developing herds of milk cows in the 1880s and 1890s, particularly after dairying proved so profitable on the hilly farms in neighboring Sussex and Hunterdon counties. Today dairying stands supreme, with Warren's cows yielding an annual income of \$8,000,000 from milk products (third in New Jersey behind Sussex and Hunterdon).

Actually, agriculture's role in Warren County has had no spectacular spurts, yet 62 per cent of the county is still in farmland (with much more of the county in thick forests). Only Phillipsburg, with about 19,000 population and several excellent industries, can claim to be sizable. The rest of Warren's 55,000 population is widespread, with Washington's 4,800 placing it second and Hackettstown third with 4,200.

WASHINGTON has the look of a town with a population much greater, since its busy, modern stores cater to a very wide shopping area. Hackettstown's well-preserved old Main

street, its college air and its extensive state fish hatchery (established in 1912) get favorable receptions from visitors.

Belvidere has a handsomeness all its own. Few towns in New Jersey—or anywhere else—can claim the atmosphere which surrounds the 125-year-old county park in Belvidere. The red brick courthouse, now expanded through the years to its present T-shape, dominates the square, but the old homes and the well-kept churches lend high tone.

Yet, the mystery of what held back great industrial development in Belvidere persists, particularly after learning that the Pequest falls 50 feet in its last mile dash through Belvidere into the Delaware. In addition, the Delaware falls 22 feet within 1½ miles of Belvidere. Be that as it may, the power has never been fully used, and in the electric age is likely never to be used.

TODAY the visitor to Warren County is secretly glad that the cascading water power didn't attract the industry which might have made the river bank another Pittsburgh or Bethlehem. Think of no covered bridge at Columbia, no shaded square in Belvidere, no peaceful Harmony, no ruggedly charming Scotts Mountain. Think of no trout rising in the Pequest, the Paulins Kill, or the Musconetcong. Think of Delaware Water Gap as only a rocky nuisance rather than as one of the East's finest natural spectacles.

Take away the cattle grazing on sloping fields, the quaintness of Blairstown and Hope, the charm of Hackettstown, the bustling small-town character of Washington and the old Oxford iron atmosphere. Surely all would have disappeared from the perimeter of a mighty industrial region.

Maybe many would prefer great factories clanging on the Delaware River banks. There are good arguments in favor of the theoretical industrial colossus, but none is convincing to the man who sees a trout strike in the rushing waters of the secluded Pequest.



State Fish Hatchery, Hackettstown, stocks streams with finny fighters.